

member of the 2019 Salve class says he will remember Sister Jane en route to “bring candy and snacks to student athletes for conference games” and her willingness to meet with any student in her office. Indeed, when visiting Newport, young alums in search of graduate school advice or a word of encouragement have known that they are welcome to stop by Sister Jane’s office to find an open door, a warm heart, and wise counsel.

Over the course of her career, Sister Jane embodied the values of her Catholic order, the Sisters of Mercy. The Sisters were founded with a mission to spread the gift of education and care for those in need in their community. Last year, Sister Jane told Newport Daily News she sees the institution she led as “imbued with mercy,” adding, “I hope I’ve helped to cultivate that spirit.”

I should note that with regard to the legacy of the Sisters of Mercy, in her service, Sister Jane also honored an extraordinary tradition of extraordinary female leadership.

As I am giving these remarks, I am so glad that the Presiding Officer in the U.S. Senate is a woman Senator.

Sister Therese, who was Sister Jane’s predecessor, was a skilled and beloved leader of Salve Regina, and Sister Lucille—before Sister Therese and before Sister Jane—was another powerful and effective leader. This impressive tradition of leadership by women is worth celebrating on its own as we celebrate the achievements of Sister Jane, and Sister Jane has shown herself well worthy and advanced that tradition.

Sister Jane, it is clear to all who know you—and that is pretty much all who love you—that the spirit of mercy has flourished at Salve Regina and has been enhanced in our State under your leadership. We wish you well in your next chapters.

I join my senior Senator in these sentiments.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Madam President, at some point during the course of these remarks, I expect the majority leader to come to the floor to put the Senate through its closing paces. When that happens, I ask unanimous consent that the part of my remarks prior to his statement be moved to join with the remainder of my remarks in the RECORD so that they are combined.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The majority leader is recognized.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 2:15 tomorrow, all postcloture time on the Collins nomination be considered expired; further, that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, the month of May is nationally designated Military Appreciation Month, so named because, in the month of May, we also observe Memorial Day, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, and Armed Forces Day. Last week, my friend from the State of Oklahoma, Mr. INHOFE, the distinguished chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, organized a floor event around National Military Appreciation Month. I would like to take a moment to lend my voice to this significant commemoration.

In the State of Alaska we like to think of military appreciation month as every month, military appreciation day as every day. Alaska is proud to host more than 19,000 Active-Duty servicemembers, more than 4,600 members of the Reserve Component, and about 5,000 appropriated funds civilians across all of the services. That number will grow significantly as the Air Force begins the beddown of the F-35A Joint Strike Fighter, at Eielson Air Force Base, its first F-35 operating base in the Pacific Area of Responsibility.

At first blush, Alaska is a difficult place to serve. It is dark in the winter, light all night in the summer, prone to temperature extremes, and geographically distant from family. Some military families who receive orders to Alaska are apprehensive at first, but when they speak with other military families that have served in Alaska, they come to understand that Alaskans treat our military families like no other people, and the opportunity to live in Alaska, while serving, is a once in a lifetime wonderful experience.

I could offer many examples of the ways in which Alaskans make life wonderful for those who serve here. The one that is freshest in my mind is the annual Military Appreciation Banquet in Fairbanks. It is one of two that Alaskans put on each year. The Fairbanks banquet tends to occur in May; the other major banquet is Salute to the Military in Anchorage each February. Both attract senior military leaders as keynote speakers. During each, the services honor outstanding members from within their ranks and thank the community for its extraordinary support.

I would like to speak to the history of the Fairbanks banquet for a moment. It began 51 years ago—1968 to be exact—when Jim and Rosemary Messer started small dinner in the home parties for friends in the military; 1968 was a pretty controversial year in the Nation’s history with the country torn over our participation in the Vietnam conflict, but the Messers were determined to show those who came from around the country to serve in Alaska some love and home-cooking.

The idea quickly outgrew the confines of the Messer home, and the Fairbanks Military Appreciation Banquet is its successor. The banquet is held in the Carlson Center, which is the convention center for Fairbanks. Capacity is about 600 people, and the banquet sells out every year. Following in the Messer legacy, each community member buys two tickets, one for themselves and another for a servicemember to host at their table.

In addition to recognizing exemplary servicemembers, the Fairbanks community recognizes one local individual each year who has done the most to promote civilian-military relations with an award. That award is named the Messer Award, in honor of the couple that inspired the annual banquet.

This year, the keynote speaker was VADM Michael J. Dumont, U.S. Navy, Deputy Commander of U.S. Northern Command. I am told he was a big hit. Last year, for the 50th anniversary, we had Gen. Joseph Lengyel, U.S. Air Force, Chief of the National Guard Bureau. We are grateful that our senior leaders travel a great distance to celebrate the military presence in Alaska’s Interior, and I know that the participants are as well.

This is an example of what we view as the golden contract between the community and the military. Each year, Alaskans go out of their way in big ways and small ones to make life for our servicemembers and their families extremely comfortable. Each year, in the presence of a distinguished senior leader, we break bread together to renew these bonds.

I am proud of those who serve in Alaska and the Alaskans who serve them, and I am proud that we observe military appreciation month every month of the year.

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTOPHER E. O’CONNOR

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, today I am proud to recognize in the RECORD the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, OCLA, Christopher E. O’Connor, in honor of his upcoming retirement. Mr. O’Connor recently received the VA’s Exceptional Service Award for his long record of service to our Nation’s veterans.

Mr. O’Connor has advised four VA Secretaries, four acting VA Secretaries, and their legislative teams as

they have worked with Congress to make a stronger and more effective department for America's veterans. He has provided continuity in the Department's communication with Congress during the shift of executive administrations.

Most recently, Mr. O'Connor worked with our committee on the VA MISSION Act, which is a major reform in veterans' healthcare. He also helped inform Members of Congress about the need to modernize the department's antiquated electronic health records system, and he played a key role as the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act made its way through Congress.

Under his leadership, Mr. O'Connor and his team prepared VA's senior leaders to successfully participate in more than 400 congressional hearings. Their office also coordinated thousands of informational briefings to Members of Congress, committee staff, and personal staff that advanced VA's message and priorities.

Upon his upcoming retirement, Mr. O'Connor leaves the Department with an important legacy. In 2017, Mr. O'Connor spearheaded the Congressional Fellowship Program, which places VA employees in a yearlong fellowship position in the office of a Member of Congress.

Today, I am honored to pay tribute to Mr. O'Connor for his service to our country and his steadfast commitment to advocating on behalf of veterans throughout his career. Congratulations to Mr. O'Connor on his lasting legacy of advocacy for veterans, and I wish him the best in his retirement.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO DAVID BRANSCUM

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today I wish to congratulate David Branscum for being named Arkansas Rural Advocate of the Year by the Arkansas Rural Development Commission.

Raised in Marshall, David is a third-generation cattle rancher, farmer, and small business owner who has dedicated more than four decades of his life to rural Arkansas. After graduating from the University of Arkansas with a degree in agriculture and economics, he returned home to run the family farm and lumber business. For 7 years, David represented House District 83 as a member of the Arkansas House of Representatives where he served on both the agriculture and health committees and chaired the legislative council. In 2017, he resigned from the House after Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue appointed him as Arkansas director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of Rural Development.

In this role, David has implemented programs across the State intended to improve the quality of life in Arkansas' rural communities. These programs in-

clude rural business development grants, single and multifamily housing loans, community facility grants, and water and waste disposal monies.

One of David's top priorities and one of the largest challenges facing Arkansas and much of rural America is access to reliable and affordable broadband connectivity. With nearly \$1 billion in grant money available nationwide to expand broadband services to rural communities, he has championed this program around our State.

I congratulate David for being named the Arkansas Rural Advocate of the Year. He has spent his career working to advance the economy and improve the standard of living for rural residents throughout Arkansas, and our State is a better place because of him.●

TRIBUTE TO CADET COLONEL SHELBY PETERSON

• Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, today I have the honor of recognizing Civil Air Patrol Cadet Colonel Shelby Petersen of Kalispell. Cadet Colonel Petersen is the first Montanan since 2004 to receive the General Carl A. Spaatz Award, which is the Civil Air Patrol's highest cadet honor.

The Spaatz Award is given to cadets who have demonstrated excellence in leadership, character, fitness, and aerospace education. The selection process is extremely rigorous, and only 5 out of every 1,000 cadets earns the award. Cadet Colonel Petersen joined the Civil Air Patrol at the age of 12, following in the footsteps of her older brother. From day 1, her goal was to become squadron commander and win the Spaatz Award. She has thrived as a member of the Flathead Composite Squadron, receiving 18 promotions and achieving her goal of becoming the squadron commander. I had the pleasure of meeting Cadet Colonel Petersen in March 2018, when she was selected to participate in the prestigious Civil Air Patrol Leadership Academy. There, cadets spend a week in Washington, DC, and gain greater insight into the inner workings of government through meetings with Members of Congress, the State Department, and the intelligence community. She is an outstanding young Montanan who understands what it means to put service before self.

As squadron commander, she has taken a keen interest in mentoring younger cadets and pushes them to set and meet high expectations for themselves. In fact, her final assignment as a Civil Air Patrol cadet is cadet commander for this summer's Civil Air Patrol boot camp.

Cadet Colonel Petersen is currently finishing her senior year at Glacier High School in Kalispell and upon graduation will enlist in the Marine Corps to continue her service to our country. I congratulate Cadet Colonel Petersen on winning the Spaatz Award, and I thank her for her service. I know that she will continue to make her community and Montana proud.●

TRIBUTE TO TOM LEWIS

• Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, today, I am honored to recognize in the RECORD Mr. Tom Lewis of Atlanta, GA, the senior adviser to the president of Georgia State University. Tom has announced he will retire in June after 28 years of service to the school.

Tom Lewis has built a strong legacy in our State and Federal Government, as well as in higher education. Early on, he learned the value of public service from his parents, Eleanor and Carlton Lewis. While he was a student at Georgia Southern University, he spent time here in the Senate as an intern for the venerable Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia. Upon his graduation from the university, he worked on the campaign of then-Presidential candidate Jimmy Carter of Plains, GA, who was subsequently elected to the office of U.S. President.

Next, Tom set out to make a difference in our State government as executive director of the Georgia Franchise Practices Commission from 1974 to 1978. Later, while he was executive vice president of the Bartow County Chamber of Commerce, Tom met and befriended State legislator Joe Frank Harris of Cartersville, GA, and his wife Elizabeth. That friendship turned into a trusted bond, and when Joe Frank Harris set out to become Governor of Georgia, Tom joined his campaign as an adviser and served in several roles in Harris's administration, including as chief of staff from 1986 to 1991.

I got to know Tom while I was also serving in the Georgia General Assembly, and he was always someone who you could count on and trust. When he went on to Georgia State University, he left his mark there, advancing the school's interests, creating new opportunities, and helping Georgia State University grow in the early years and then absolutely take off. The Washington Post has called Georgia State University a "hotbed of growth and innovation." This and many of its other well-earned accolades are due not only to a serious and active student body, but also thanks to the long-term planning and constant efforts of great leaders like Tom Lewis.

In addition to his accomplishments spanning decades and touching countless lives, Tom and his wife Patty are the parents of three children, Wes, Ellen, and Shannon. His five grandchildren, Wesley Claire, Leighton, Will, Nate, and Jacks will surely benefit from Tom's retirement. I have a strong suspicion that his home community of Cartersville, GA, will benefit from the additional time he is able to spend in town, too.

As Tom and Patty prepare for this new chapter, I wish them and their families all the best. I offer my deepest gratitude for their friendship and work on behalf of our State.●